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Catherine

The Faithful Queen Dowager

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Abstract:

Most of the young aristocratic women during the Renaissance had no say in who they were to marry. If they were Queens, or holding influential positions of power of any higher kind, they could pick and choose between bridegrooms. In Lucrezia Borgia's case, her arranged marriage to the Lord of Val d'Ayora was annulled less than two months later. Today, one would say that there were "irreconcilable differences". That was, however, a very rare case. Her father was Pope Alexander VI.

Catherine Stenbock's father was not a pope. He was, nevertheless, a nobleman and belonged to one of the most influential families in Sweden. When King Gustav Vasa proclaimed having chosen Catherine as his new Queen, the young girl had no other choice than to accept his offer. It wasn't that she didn't fight or try to run and hide.

She did hide. Where? Behind a bush.

Eventually, she had to come out and her father could again smile. His daughter would become the most powerful woman in the country.

The real achievement was the grace, dignity, intelligence and nobility with which Catherine handled the situation. She silenced the sceptics by becoming a faithful and hardworking Queen and a regal personality.

Working as a trilingual tour guide at Kalmar Castle during the 1990's, I came across stories about this woman on many occasions. This paper is the result of two decades of research: I present to you now Sweden's most dignified and faithful Queen Dowager: Catherine Stenbock.

Keywords: Swedish history, Renaissance women, Arranged marriages, 16th century royalty.